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# Deployment

**“Honey, it’s official: We go on Deployment next year, in the Spring, sometime.”**

It doesn’t matter whether this is your first or fifth deployment this devilish “D” word can create a rather large sense that everything is about to be not quite right in your world. While it may be your fifth deployment, it may be your first as the spouse of a CO or XO, and you know from past experience that the leadership from these two people is extremely important. They are expected to have all the answers, solutions and ideas that will guarantee happy, sunny days with no problems and make time tick by faster!

## **“Expected to have all the answers”**

... that’s enough to cause a flip-flop or two in the stomach! Yet expectations evolve from a confidence that begins with early preparation and tackling of those questions that are causing you sleepless nights. The best place to start? With yourself! After all, you know yourself better than anyone else and you know what life is like when you are on your own. If life, the children, his family, your job, the unpleasant neighbors are going to be too much for you to handle while the ship’s gone, the last thing you need is to be saddled with another series of responsibilities.

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| ■ How comfortable are you in your role as CO/XO spouse? | ■ Will you want to be involved only when there are problems or crises? | ■ Are you flexible?   |
| ■ Will you be active and support all functions?         | ■ Would you prefer only an advisory role?                              | ■ (If a CO spouse) What role do you want the XO’s spouse to be? Define the game plan. |
| ■ Will you want to organize functions?                  | ■ Can you delegate or prefer to micro-manage?                          | ■ Can you to squash/quell rumors?   |
| ■ How well do you delegate?                             |  | ■ Deadlines? Love ‘em? Hate ‘em?  |

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## Command Team

OK, you've briefed yourself, you've been through deployments before, you know what worked in the past, what pitfalls to avoid and you're ready to step up to the challenge of making this deployment a fun one. Your next step? Go to the top! Make an appointment with the CO, even if the CO is your spouse.

The purpose of the meeting is to put together your "Command Team," a group of people who will readily be available to help you handle both the everyday and extraordinary situations which will arise during deployment. In determining who best to have on the team, ask the CO how he wants the following questions or situations dealt with:

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ What are your expectations of me?</li><li>■ Since the XO's (or CO's) spouse has opted to remain out of state, how do you want to handle that?</li><li>■ Who is my point of contact in the Navy while you are deployed?</li><li>■ Is there a sister ship?</li><li>■ What are the appropriate means of communication?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Newsletter?</li><li>• Careline? Who updates it?</li><li>• Will there be regular messages from the CO?</li><li>• Correct E-mail procedure for both crew and family members?</li><li>• Correct mailing address?</li><li>• Are there emergency "panic" numbers?</li></ul></li><li>■ Will the ombudsman have a more active role?</li><li>■ Will the ombudsman's term expire before the deployment ends?</li><li>■ Should another ombudsman be added prior to deployment?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Will the ombudsman be able to convey information regarding port visits/schedules?</li><li>■ Do you want to encourage spouses/families to come for visits?</li><li>■ Will there be a mid-deployment change of command?</li><li>■ Who is due to rotate off the ship? Are their replacements known?</li><li>■ How do you want to include out-of-town/state spouses?</li><li>■ What about "significant others" (i.e., fiancées, girlfriends, etc.)?</li><li>■ How do you want to handle births?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will the deployed parent be allowed home? Under what circumstances?</li><li>• Does the Command have a procedure or tradition to recognize births?</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ How does the Command wish to handle family illness?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Crisis (both at sea and at home)?</li><li>• Death?</li><li>• Case by case basis?</li><li>• Under what circumstances would you send the deployed family member home?</li></ul></li><li>■ How does the CO want to deal with out of state families of young singles? Newsletter?</li><li>■ What is the CO doing to prepare his ship for deployment?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shipwide? Legal Affairs? NFSC?</li><li>• Are you expected to attend the meetings? Lead separate meetings? Set up the meetings?</li></ul></li><li>■ Family activities while the ship is deployed – who funds these? Ship? MWR? Sponsor?</li><li>■ Homecoming — Briefly, what are the Command's initial expectations? Tiger Cruise? (Understand that the details will be worked out later.)</li></ul> |
|---|--|--|

You can readily determine by the answers to these questions that your “Command Team” will start shaping up to include the spouses of the CO and XO, the CMC/COB, Ombudsman, and the ship’s support group president or chairman. Depending on the size of the ship deploying, additional people outside of the ship such as a past advisor, chaplain, NFSC Representative, or mentor might be included. Before you end your first meeting with the CO you might want to ask his opinion on the formation of your “Command Team.” Who would he include and why? The CO might want your input as to what your expectations might be of his Command.

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Is there a newsletter?</li> <li>■ Prior to deployment can it include a page of special emergency numbers?</li> <li>■ Current roster?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Could roster be mailed rather than brought home – often it never gets there?</li> <li>■ Phone tree? Emergency phone tree?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Schedule of pre-deployment events?</li> <li>■ Working schedule of events during deployment?</li> <li>Projected port calls? Dates?</li> </ul> |
|--|---|---|

Realize that some of the above questions have no ready answers. While your meeting with the CO is still fresh, start putting together your Command Team. You can determine their overall availability and desire to work with you as you assemble the team and schedule your first meeting. Plan to go over what you learned from your first meeting with the CO and to get from them their own questions, suggestions and ideas. After this initial meeting, it would be a good idea to have your Command Team and the CO’s Command Team meet to further encourage openness, camaraderie, and provide further answers to on-going problems. After that meeting, you and your Command Team can concentrate on creating or re-activating a family support group.

There will be lots of information that will need to be covered in the months prior to deployment, ID checks, Page 2, Power of Attorney and other legalities to name a few. Did you know that a Navy Family Service Center Representative is assigned to the ship to aid you in making deployment information available?

Remember, too, that usually before the actual deployment begins, there are several month-long or six-week long work-ups that the ship will be involved in. This is an ideal time to have your own “work-up” or two. Have a couple of meetings to plan the activities calendar while the ship is away. (A sample follows. Ideally this page is handed out at the pier the day of departure, or enclosed as part of the ship’s newsletter.) This can be your Command Team’s training time as well as the ship’s. Any unforeseen problems or questions that arise can be dealt with appropriately which in turn will build confidence in you, your Command Team and the rest of the ship’s families.

# SAMPLE: SPOUSE DEPLOYMENT PLAN

(Handed out at pier the morning ship departed)

## USS COMEHOME FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- September 14 7 P.M. MONTHLY MEETING IN CHAPEL) – (babysitting provided at the Rainbow Connection)  
18 FAMILY POOL PARTY at Base pool – 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. No charge. must RSVP by 9/11. Please bring a dessert to share.
- October 7 GLAMOUR SHOTS at USO. Starting at 4, 5, and 6 p.m.  
12 7 P.M. MONTHLY MEETING IN CHAPEL – (babysitting provided at the Rainbow Connection)  
23 FAMILY PIZZA AND BOWLING PARTY at Base Bowling Alley – 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. No charge. Must RSVP by 10/16.
- November 12 HALFWAY DINNER – (babysitting available at Rainbow Connection)  
Dinner will be at one of the Clubs's on base. There will be about a \$7/ person charge. Funds from the ship will pay for the balance. Kereoke and line dancing, too!!
- MOVIE/SKATING PARTY – no date available for now.
- December 7 7 P.M. MONTHLY MEETING IN CHAPEL – (babysitting provided at the Rainbow Connection)  
11 CHRISTMAS PARTY – at Chuck E. Cheese's or the Discovery Zone. No charge. Must RSVP by 12/1.
- January 11 7 P.M. MONTHLY MEETING IN CHAPEL – (babysitting provided at the Rainbow Connection)

\*\*\*\* We will be working on "Homecoming" at all the monthly meetings. We will be going all out for "Homecoming" but we will not be "stressing out." Work parties other than the monthly meetings will need to be scheduled and we will let you know when they are. We will also be making holiday decorations and sending them monthly to the ship. We need your help so please join us.

\*\*\*\* Babysitting at the Rainbow Connection – You must reserve a spot for your child/children with Sandra at 123-4567 at least two weeks before each event/meeting. You can drop your child/children off by 6:30 p.m. and must pick them up by 9:30 p.m. The charge will be \$1/ child/evening.

\*\*\*\* We are most fortunate that the cost of these events will be subsidised or completely paid for with MWR funds the ship has left behind and/or by family support group fundraising.

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## SAMPLE: SPOUSE DEPLOYMENT PLAN

(Handed out at pier the morning ship departed)

### USS COMEHOME HOMECOMING PLANS

Colors                Red, White, and Blue — Traditional and tasteful  
Committees        Volunteers Needed

#### 1. DECORATIONS

- A. Banners – paint and/or decorate banners for brow, pier, overpass, jetty, road outside base
- B. Signs for road/main street — on base five signs to paint and decorate
- C. Bows, bows, bows!! as many as we can make — garland and streamers to decorate brow, canopies, and fences

#### 2. PUBLICITY

- A. Request businesses to put welcome home messages on their marquees
- B. Make sure our homecoming is in the newspapers

#### 3. DONATIONS

- A. Request coupons and donations from area businesses for drawings, doorprizes, etc.

#### 4. WELCOME FAMILIES

- A. Supply area maps and informations about bases, hotels, restaurants, etc. to out-of-town families
- B. Receptions for out-of-town families night before ship arrives

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## The Command Deploys (or, the Beginning of the End of Deployment!)

Okay. The Command has left, you've had your farewell brunch, and gone home to the loneliness. Each of us facing separation goes through four stages of the "Departure – Return Cycle":

1. Protest against loss or departure
2. Despair
3. Detachment
4. Return Adjustment

As a CO/XO spouse, this is compounded two-fold. Whether you have chosen an active role in the support of the crew spouses willingly, or fallen into the role, they look to you to lead them. This adventure – the deployment to end all deployments – is your opportunity to rise to the challenge and conquer the odds. You've formed your Command Team, you've tested this team a couple of times. Consider those work-ups your "trial by fire." You, your Team and group are practically old hands by now! So dab your eyes dry once more, put away those hankies and re-check that activities calendar. There's no time like the present to start working on that Homecoming!!!

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# Questionnaire for a Spouse Club

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_ Anniversary: \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Names: \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdays: \_\_\_\_\_

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Emergency Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouses Projected Rotation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you were to receive a welcome basket, what three items would you like to see in it?

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What hobbies, crafts, authors or sports interest do you have?

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Do you have any pets, If so, names and types.

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What is your favorite color? \_\_\_\_\_

What color is your home decorated in? \_\_\_\_\_

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What are your three favorite local restaurants?

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What would make a perfect day off for you?

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# Activities for the Spouse Group while the command is deployed

Unity within your group(s) is important, even when the command is not deployed. Starting communication before the command leaves is an essential component to successful support and wardroom spouse groups. Getting together with your groups at least once a month under a relaxed environment is an easy way to achieve this. Try to stagger meeting times and days of the week so that working spouses have a greater opportunity of attending.

Try and have meetings at “kid friendly” locations and provide babysitting whenever possible! Church youth groups are looking for service projects and may provide the sitting for free. Also many schools require students to obtain community service hours, so high school students may be willing to babysit for your group for free as well. Also some spouses may have children of babysitting age who would be willing to come to meetings and watch over the younger kids!

Try to have members of your support group adopt the single service members of your command. This way they are not left out when care packages are sent.

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## ☐ **Secret Pals.**

Make up a questionnaire for each spouse. Get information like: birthday, anniversary, likes, dislikes, children’s names, pets, hobbies, etc. Have each spouse draw a questionnaire from a pile and be a Secret Pal to that person through the deployment. This really helps get some through deployment blues and keeps out cliques.

## ☐ **Auto Maintenance.**

Learn simple car maintenance tips from the base hobby shop or other trained mechanics.

## ☐ **Wok Works.**

Each person brings an ingredient that is pre-sliced and ready to add to the stir-fry.

## ☐ **Karaoke Challenge.**

Have a challenge involving writing words to popular songs. Draw team members’ names from a hat to get to know one another better.

## ☐ **Learn a Craft.**

Have the talented members of your club share their craft with the rest of the group.

## ☐ **Salad Night.**

Guests bring prepared items for a salad.

## ☐ **Build-a-sub night.**

Each person brings an ingredient to share.

## ☐ **Wine and cheese.**

Have each guest bring his or her favorite.

## ☐ **Pot Luck Dinners.**

Bring your spouse’s favorite recipe or have everyone try one of those great-sounding recipes that they’ve been wanting to try but been reluctant to fix, or bring a dish from the country that the command is visiting at the time.

## ☐ **Celebrity Party.**

Come as your favorite celebrity.

## ☐ **Decorative Pillow Cases.**

Before the command leaves, have computer-image photographs (available at several of the local malls) of family members imprinted on pillowcases or decorate the pillowcases using permanent markers or inks.

## ☐ **Healthy Outings.**

Hiking, biking, walking, swimming, meeting at a base gym, and other outside activities are a great way to keep busy, healthy, and active.

A group of friends makes it more fun. Most base gyms have personal trainers to help you set up an exercise program that is best for you.

## ☐ **Prepare Thanksgiving Food Baskets.**

The base Chaplain Center usually organizes these and delivers them for you.

### ☐ **Collect Sunday comics.**

Ask a few spouses to save the comics from Sunday's paper and send them weekly to the command's library. It is amazing how many deployed service members will look forward to receiving this package.

### ☐ **Collage.**

Gather pictures from the families of as many crew members as possible (a plea in the Ombudsman newsletter will do). Organize them into a collage for display in a prominent place on the ship/sub.

### ☐ **Learn.**

MWR and some community centers may offer classes in golf, sailing, and scuba diving, square dancing, tennis, pottery, etc. Home improvement stores have classes on techniques from wall papering to repairing drywall. Craft stores have endless classes as well. Take a class as a group of a few people. It can be lots of fun!

### ☐ **Auction.**

Everyone brings a NICE White Elephant item. Participants "bid" on items by placing a dime (or some other agreed upon coin) in a basket that circulates around the room. A timer is set for a random amount of time, and when it goes off, the last person to put a dime in the basket gets the item.

### ☐ **Guest Speakers.**

Hold a workshop on assertiveness, time management, protocol, stress/burnout, spouse employment, safety/security. Contact Family Services for a list of speakers.

### ☐ **Ethnic Food Cooking Demonstration.**

Find talent at your local restaurants, cooking school, or you may have a talented spouse among your group to come to a meeting and teach a new special recipe. Garnishing ideas are also popular.

### ☐ **Hat and Gloves meeting.**

Everyone must wear a hat and gloves. This can range from pillbox and silk to bike helmets and gardening gloves.

### ☐ **Adopt a family.**

Become an angel and provide Christmas gifts and meals for an under-privileged family. Your command, Salvation Army, churches, or Navy-Marine Corps Relief will have information.

### ☐ **Adopt a shelter or cause.**

Volunteer time, supplies, or talent. This way more than just money passes between your group and the needy.

### ☐ **Food Shelters.**

Have everyone bring a canned food item to each meeting and periodically bring it to the local food bank.

### ☐ **Video plays.**

Gather the spouses from each division and have them act out a day in the service member's life during deployment. Make it as comical as possible. Send it to the command and wait for the replies!

### ☐ **Whine and Wine Party.**

Have everyone bring a favorite wine or appetizer and compare stories!

### ☐ **Sheets and Blankets.**

Stencil the command insignia onto a bedspread, sheet or blanket for each of the service members. Don't forget the single sailors/marines.

### ☐ **Spouse Jigsaw puzzles.**

Take a picture of each spouse or of the group and cut it (or have it made professionally) into a jigsaw puzzle.

### ☐ **Boo Hoo Party.**

Have one at someone's house the night of deployment!

### ☐ **Establish a Family Support Group website.**

Post pictures often for the deployed service members to see!

### ☐ **Fondue Party.**

Cheese or chocolate. No need for chairs, all can sit on the floor.

### ☐ **Visit hospitals, local VA centers or Nursing homes.**

Bring baskets of goodies (cookies, chips, and nuts are good choices). This reflects well on the command's image and makes you feel really good.

### ☐ **Fancy dinner.**

Treat yourselves with china, crystal, etc. Teen family members might be paid to serve the meal.

### ☐ **Murder Mystery.**

Arrange for a group to participate in a mystery at a local restaurant.

### ☐ **"Day in the life of" videos.**

Ask for a video of a typical day of the command to be shown at a meeting

### ☐ **Progressive Dinners.**

Serve a different course at several different houses or restaurants.

☐ **Progressive Dinner in one person's home.**

A great way to welcome newcomers is for one person to have different courses in different areas of her home and in each area have different seating arrangements so the newcomer has a chance to meet everyone.

☐ **Beauty workshop.**

Have an image consultant talk to your group about fashion, colors, wardrobing and make-up.

☐ **Glamour Photos/Make-overs.**

Have everyone arrive with NO MAKEUP! Ask a make-up consultant to join you and have pictures taken of the results. There are now companies that will do both the make-up and photography and give group rates.

☐ **Dine out "without."**

Pick one night a month to meet at a local restaurant.

☐ **Outchop Dinner.**

Prepare "Deployment" related questions and place one under each dinner plate to be answered during dinner. (i.e. "What part of the deployment were you not prepared for?" or "What was the highlight of your deployment?" "What will you do differently on your next deployment?" "What will your spouse do differently on your next deployment?")

☐ **Monthly birthday/anniversary celebrations.**

Recognize each person's birthday and/or anniversary with a card or excuse for a night out!

☐ **Baby Picture Night.**

Have everyone bring a baby picture of themselves and of their husband and see who can match up the most.

☐ **Hat Hunting.**

Have everyone meet at a mall and shop for hats to go with homecoming outfits. Or meet to shop for the homecoming outfit!

☐ **Game and Dessert Night.**

Have everyone bring a dessert and a game. Or play bunko, bingo, etc. as a large group. Establish one night a month as "bunko night" and have every one bring someone new each time. Bunko is a great way for the members of your support group to get to know each other!

☐ **UFO Party.**

"Unidentified Foreign Object" have a white elephant gift exchange involving things obtained at other duty stations, preferably foreign duty stations.

☐ **Personal Growth Nights.**

Have everyone bring a new project or an unfinished project to work on while watching a movie or just chatting.

☐ **Share your holidays.**

Have a sign up list for those who want to host and those what want to attend. Potlucks make it fun and easy for all.

☐ **Night out.**

Pick one night a month to meet at the movies.

☐ **Command garage sale.**

☐ **Spouse Appreciation Day.**

Remind your command before they deploy that Spouse Appreciation Day is the Friday before Mother's Day. Suggest that the command make certificates for each spouse, or possibly send money to purchase flowers.

☐ **Movie and pizza night.**

If someone has two VCR's you can have an adult's movie and a kid's movie going at the same time!

☐ **Wedding Album Shower.**

Have all bring photos of their wedding, and serve wedding cake and champagne as refreshments. It is fun to wear headpieces or the whole gown to the party!

Have one person volunteer their house and then have everyone else bring their yard sale items to that location the night before. Don't forget the add in the paper and signs to put up the day of the sale! This is a good excuse to clean out that garage and attic! Donate half or all of the funds raised to your treasury, and it is a great fundraiser too!

☐ **Make a perpetual calendar.**

See pattern included. These are great, and the service members look forward to receiving the calendar squares each month!



## Tips

- If you have a less than active family support group, have a "homecoming committee" instead, with the one focus. Those who may not come to other types of activities may well support an attend things related to homecoming!

Video and Photograph as many events as you can! The deployed service members enjoy seeing what you are doing at home!

### Materials Needed:

- Directions:**

For the top edge: turn top edge  $\frac{1}{2}$ " and press. Measure 3" from fold, turn and press. Stitch close to folded edge to create a pocket. Once finished, draw stitching lines on back on wrong side of fabric. Refer to diagram for measurements. Pockets will be 7" wide and 9" deep.

Create a pocket for the month on the top of calendar with leftover vinyl. Pocket will be 12" wide by 4½" deep.

Sew carefully, do not stitch into the pocket rod or close the top pockets.

**Finishing:** Cut carefully, close to the stitching at top of each pocket. Add decorations. Keep in mind seasonal and holiday changes.

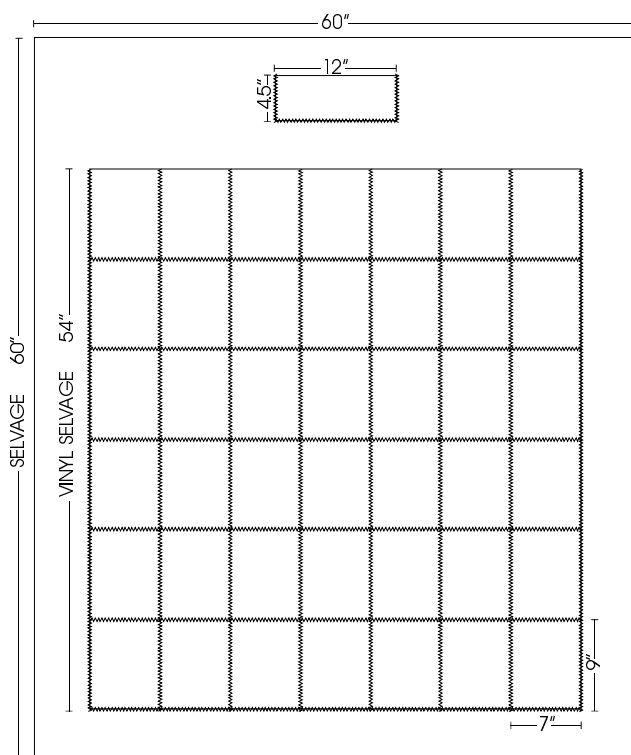
Set a monthly deadline for squares to be turned in to be mailed. Make it the same day each month so it will become a routine.

Don't forget to include the bachelors, and out-of-town spouses who might want to do squares for their active duty members. Include families and significant others to make calendar squares.

Have fun but keep it tasteful. Keep in mind that lots of people will be interested in seeing this calendar.

Have the calendar mounted in the wardroom before the ship leaves and have the first month of squares put in the pockets the morning of departure.

## BE CREATIVE!!



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# Treats For Our Sweets

No matter when the command deploys, many calendar pages will be flipped before Homecoming Day arrives. Birthdays, Holidays, Anniversaries and other special occasions will be spent solo. But remember that your spouse too, will be solo and usually pretty far away from family and friends as these special days come and go, so surprise or brighten those special days some of these ideas:

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## Before the Ships Sail:

Adopt a Sailor. Spouses share responsibilities for including treats for the various bachelors, especially if there aren't any significant others involved. Extended families can be included, but be sure to check with the bachelor first before contacting his family. Obtain birthday info and other important dates directly from the bachelor or get a reliable buddy to fill in the necessary details. Don't be upset if some bachelors don't wish to be adopted.

Bon Voyage Package. Think small but practical items (remember space is limited) such as: disposable cameras, blank video tapes (be sure someone will have a vid-

eo camera onboard), pre-printed address labels, stamps, letter writing materials, phone cards, a journal, refrigerator type magnets with family photos attached, favorite coffee mug (fill it with kisses, M&Ms, peanuts or other favorite snack food), new or favorite CDs or tapes, (batteries?), paperback books, magazines, crosswords, deck of cards, etc., etc. Either surprise the lucky recipient of such thoughtfulness when you say your goodbyes or arrange to have it waiting in the stateroom, on the rack or delivered shortly after pulling away from the pier.

Perpetual Calendar. (Directions included) Determine a contact person for the wardroom, ready room or mess deck who will regularly receive and update the monthly packages of cards, jokes, cartoons, pictures, etc. to be slipped into the daily, numbered pockets of the month. Try to get the calendar and first installment (week or month) ready a day or two before the ship departs. Use the calendar as an easy way to promote fun working and socializing parties within the group.

Cards/Love Notes. Don't be bashful, just tasteful! Secretly slip a couple of these in the bags as you help pack.

## After the Ships Sail:

Decide as a group what to do about certain times or holidays that the deployment faces. Should the group put together one large Trick or Treat bag for everyone to share in the wardroom, ready room or mess deck or do they want to individually provide for their own spouses? Set limits as to expense, size, and weight of individual items, not only to keep shipping costs down but to avoid hurt feelings should someone receive a smaller sized

gift or worse, be left out entirely. Always bear in mind the space limitations that exist onboard – that space will get smaller as the deployment winds down! Remember to set firm dates for completion of gifts and stick to the timetable. Lastly, realize that some may not wish to celebrate the same days in the same ways.

The following ideas are suggested for their ease and flexibility, whether dealing as one individual or a group. They are designed

to get the creative juices flowing as ideas often suggest other ideas. Pinching "this" from one or borrowing "that" from another is by all means encouraged. The object is to have fun while spreading fun. So pick the time frame when your "Sweets" will be deployed and begin gathering up those "Treats."

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# Children's Activities

A major part of keeping families intact during deployments is doing projects together in which everyone of any age can participate. Having parties and social events for children can be a great way to bring military children together for fun, friendship, and a sense of belonging. Some of these ideas may come in handy when children start questioning deployment absences with "Why?" "Where?" "When?" and "How much longer?" These activities are also good for small numbers (i.e., several families) or large numbers such as the Wardroom, Ready Room, or Family Support Group. And don't forget to videotape or take pictures of the kids and their activities, especially if some of these finished products are sent to the ship!

## **Children's Sunday Sundae Parties.**

Have each family bring their favorite toppings. (Let the club furnish the ice cream, if funds allow.) Creativity soars, as there is "something about ice cream."

## **Picnic in the Park.**

Each family brings a salad to share, something to grill, and drinks for themselves. Either before eating or after, have parent/child potato sack and three-legged races, relay races, or simply sit back and enjoy the scenery.

## **Meet at the Beach/Pool.**

Take advantage of the area's numerous beaches and waterways. Having several adults watching the children makes the outing a little easier; or use on-base or apartment pools. Pack lots of suntan lotion and don't forget yourself, too — sun, sea and sand brings out the kid in all of us!

## **Costume Party.**

Don't reserve this idea just for Halloween! There's Easter, July 4<sup>th</sup> Parades, Miss America, etc.

## **Movies.**

Take the kids to the movies — check with MWR to get discounted tickets — or rent some children's videos for an impromptu movie marathon.

## **Game Day.**

Break out the board games or card games and introduce today's children to yesterday's games. It's great entertainment and doesn't have to involve a computer!

## **Wands and Crowns.**

Children can make wands out of cardboard boxes, aluminum foil, straws and ribbons. Crowns can be made out of construction paper.

## **Hats and Shoes.**

Have children dress in hats (or related accessories) and shoes of other professions, i.e., nurses, doctors, construction workers, policeman, firefighter, bee keeper (bring honey — no bees!).

## **Fore or Score!**

Take the kids Putt-Putting or bowling.

## **Dress-Up Dinner.**

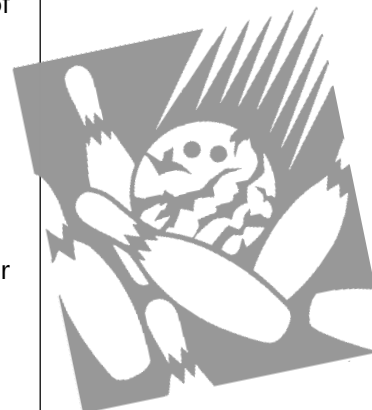
Give the children their own "black tie affair." Wait on them (and teach them!) how to handle themselves before, during and after the event.

## **Craft Day.**

Make a simple craft with the children such as laminated placemats for Holidays or anyday. Send an "I Love You" or "I Miss You" placemat to dad, mom, grandparents, etc.

## **"Ransom Note."**

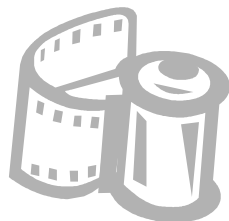
Have kids cut out words from newspapers, magazines, junk mail, etc., glue onto fun paper and send as a note. Cut out words could also be used to caption photos.





## Morale, Welfare & Recreation (MWR).

MWR has a wealth of information on all topics from sports to movies to party ideas. Be sure to pick up their monthly publications and take advantage of their special DISCOUNTED ticket offers – everything from sporting events (local and professional), movies, theatre, museums, etc. They've done the legwork and secured the discounts. All you have to do is GO!



## Film.

When developing pictures, always get double prints – as the saying goes: “One to keep and one to share.” Also, when taking pictures, take two or three shots of the same thing. This saves having to pour over the negatives and send in an extra reprint order. Save left-over “giveaways” to include with Christmas, Thinking of You or other anytime cards.

## Maps.

Hang a large world map (or use the map provided in the Virginian-Pilot) on a cork board and have the children use colored pushpins to chart the progress of the command.



## Garlands.

Create and decorate construction paper ornaments (hearts, ghosts, Easter eggs, pumpkins, Santas, shamrocks, Stars, Christmas trees, etc.). Hook them together to form a garland which can then be used to decorate a Wardroom, Ready Room, Mess Deck or work space. Variation: Take long strips of plastic wrap and roll goodies in the wrap. Section off between goodies with colorful curling ribbon. Ends can be knotted to create individual leis (great for beach parties) or left as one long chain and hung as a garland, depending on the weight of the goodies!

## Time Chain.

Make 3 paper chains: the first should have as many links as there are days in the deployment; the second, the number of weeks in the deployment; and the third, as many months. As the links are removed, send them to the deployed parent. Seeing the chain become shorter is believing that time is passing!!

## Plan Menus.

While the command is in a foreign port, try having the kids plan a menu that their deployed parent might sample in that port. This can be as easy as French Fries, Belgian Waffles, Kielbasa, or spaghetti and pizza!

## Foreign Cultures.

While dining on the appropriate foreign foods, take some time to learn about the culture of the country that the parent is visiting. Perhaps an upcoming holiday (Ramadan, Bastille Day, Cinco de Mayo, etc.) can spark a thumbnail sketch of the country's history, customs, traditions, etc. Or draw on the area's resources (NATO connections, people who were stationed overseas) and invite someone to come (in traditional dress?) and share their country's history, culture, homes, schools, etc. Can be lots of fun and entertaining, not to mention insightful.

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# Holiday Parties for Children

Holidays are a special time for families and need to be memorable for kids of all ages, including adults! There are many books on planning children's parties available in stores and at the library. When planning parties, remember that a little activity goes a long way — children are often overwhelmed with too much stimulation. Often they are content in simply being with other kids and participating in some of the following ideas:

## Valentine's Day

### Create Valentine cards.

Use construction paper, doilies, old cards, etc. Include current photos and plan on sending them to the deployed parent.

### Make Valentine cookies.

These can be as easy as buying refrigerated sugar cookies to bake and decorate or as complicated as dragging out the flour and your favorite cookie cutter recipe.

## St. Patrick's Day

### Cookies.

Pillsbury makes refrigerated cookies with a green shamrock in the center. Slice, bake and serve warm or decorate with frosting, jimmies, etc.

### Pot o'Gold.

Fill a small pot with gold foil covered chocolate coins and cookies and place it at the end of a rainbow which a Leprechaun has made and hidden somewhere in the house.

### Jello.

Make lime jello and pour into shamrock molds. Serve plain or with whipped cream.

## Easter

### Easter Eggs.

Break out the dyes and color hardboiled eggs; paint wooden eggs; decorate plastic eggs with paint or stickers; bake Easter egg cookies or cupcakes and decorate with frosting, jelly beans, etc. Do ahead of time and use in egg hunts, Easter baskets, etc. Remember to take pictures!!

### Easter Egg Hunt.

Divide children into several age groups and send them off to search for eggs. Reuseable plastic eggs filled with jelly beans, coins, all kinds of gift certificates (McDonald's, bowling, miniature golf, movies) allow for multiple hunts. Include a "golden egg" hidden in each hunt which can be turned in for a special prize appropriate to the age group. Remember the video cam!!!

### Easter Bunny.

Rent, buy or create an Easter Bunny costume and take pictures of the children visiting with the bunny.

### Pot Luck Easter Brunch.

Nice reason for a get-together before or after the egg hunt and a good way to unload all of those hardboiled eggs — devil 'em or make egg salad sandwiches!

## Carnival Games / Birthday Bashes

If carnival game parties are used, divide the children into groups and rotate them through all games. This creates a more "organized" atmosphere!

Check with MWR for "hi-tech" games/activities which can include pony rides, dunk tanks, bouncing platforms, etc.

Use balls (ping-pong, nerf, tennis, etc.) with Velcro glued on and tossed at a piece of felt covered plywood cutout relating to a theme (baseball, football, Christmas tree, clown, etc.). Give special prizes for bull's eyes, TDs, homers, as appropriate.

"Fish" for small prizes. Paint or decorate a large cardboard box to resemble a pond, a sack, or holiday container. Kids take turns "fishing" by dropping a line through a hole and "hooking" a prize. (Ideas for hooks can be opened paper clips or velcro.) Or have the "hook" consist of a clothespin attached to a string which, when dropped through the opening, gets a prize attached to it courtesy of a hidden helper. A gentle tug signals the child that they've "hooked a whopper." (Determine whether prizes will be wrapped or unwrapped ahead of time, as well as size, cost, color, etc.)



Face Painting. Children of all ages enjoy this activity. Have your cameras ready to share memories with the command.

Treasure or Scavenger Hunts can be “themed” according to the occasion.

Bingo, plain or themed: Use Valentine candies (non-melting!), jelly beans, M&Ms, pennies, popcorn, etc. to cover the called numbers or shapes instead of the usual chips or daubers.

## Independence Day

### “All Hands Picnic.”

Show your patriotism and dress up in red, white and blue. Bring all-American fare like hotdogs and hamburgers to eat but save room for red, white and blue desserts like strawberries, ice creams, and blueberry pies.

### Community Parade.

Make a float or form a group (costumed, marching, band?) to participate in the parade. While this takes lots of time and organization, it is well worth the effort, especially if preserved in pictures!

### Banners, Bunting and Bows.

With the plentiful availability of red, white and blue materials, this is especially practical for use now as well as when the deployment ends (just wrap, roll and store carefully)!

## Christmas

### Movies and Popcorn.

Rent old cartoons and movies frequently watched at Christmas. Most clubs have a big screen TV or VCR that they will rent for a nominal charge. Santa could visit at the end! Or, invite kids over for movies while mom shops!!! Guaranteed good behavior!!!

### Color Pages and Christmas Cards.

Have the kids color their own cards or one giant card to be sent to the command.

### Stockings.

Fill with donated items ranging from your own home baked cookies to certificates from fast food chains, toys from local merchants, MWR, etc.

### Caroling.

Get a group together and have fun serenading your local neighborhood. Warm up afterwards with hot chocolate, mulled cider and Christmas cookies.



## ADDITIONAL IDEAS .....

## Halloween

The granddaddy of all themed parties can be spooky, scary, or autumn-festive as determined by the ages and numbers of children involved. So break out the orange, black, and purple lights; decorate with spider webs; hang ghosts from doorways; and power up that front doormat that screams or moans when you step on it! Remember the cameras or videocams and plan early if reserving a room, a fortune teller, a face painter, or a visit by Frankenstein or the Mummy!

### Jack o'Lanterns.

Take the kids to the pumpkin patch and pick the appropriate pumpkin. A couple of smaller pumpkins might work better than one large one. Decorate the pumpkins by either carving (adults only) or coloring with magic markers. (Very small gourds make great pumpkins, left as is, or add wacky stickers or magic marker colorings.)

### Cookies.

Slice and bake sugar cookies with chocolate bats and orange pumpkins already inside each roll. Decorate with frostings and jimmies or eat plain before they turn cold!

Bake up a batch of brownies and ice with orange frosting. Use chocolate chips or raisins for faces, bat outlines, etc.

### Trick or Treat at the Mall.

Less mess, less organization! For smaller groups this may sound too easy to be true, but it is fun. Area mall merchants and restaurants are very helpful in providing a safe place for kids (and moms!) to come dressed to "go for the goodies!"

### Costume Contest.

Have special prizes for the prettiest, scariest, funniest, cutest...

### The Great Pumpkin.

Rent, buy or create a Great Pumpkin costume and don't forget your cameras!

### Witch's Pantry.

The "beauty" of this idea is imagination: large, unpitted olives or peeled grapes become eyeballs; warmed tomato juice is blood; warmed, gooey oatmeal is "stomach contents;" cooked, oiled spaghetti is worms; cold tortilla shells can be cut into bat wings; strategically draped thread or yarn within the pathway are spiderwebs; tie fuzzy bees on strings and call them spiders, flies, or baby bats; cooked rotini noodles are maggots; long balloons "slimed" with egg whites or grease are intestines; chocolate pudding becomes brains; a pile of chocolate frosting becomes... well, you get the idea! And if you need more ideas, just ask the teenagers!!!! Not only can they think up the grossest stuff, they can also act as "guides" and describe to each "guest" what is being felt and touched!!!

### Traditional Haunted House.

Determine how dark or scary the

"house" is to be, then use a room with two entrances (or section off part of a room with blankets or drapes to create an entrance/exit). Inside the room, "the sky's the limit": create scary lighting effects, play weird music, puff in air blasts, have a fortune teller, ghosts, witches, monsters or a Witch's Pantry.

### Movies/Videos.

Show classic horror thrillers from Boris Karloff, to Stephen King and Johnny Depp; have a "Scream"-athon; don't forget the series, "Nightmare on Elm Street," "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>" or "Halloween" and of course, don't forget the popcorn! This is particularly good for teens or older kids who aren't interested in trick or treating. The movies can start early and run late, especially if Halloween falls on a weekend. Send the kids home with a tasty feast of blood and worms (spaghetti with lots of sauce!) or other late night breakfast courtesy of the Witch's Pantry!



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# Calendar Year of ideas

Not all commands deploy during the same time of year, the following is a sampling of monthly ideas to start your creative thinking.



## January

### **New Year's Eve in a Box**

Decorate plastic champagne flutes with markers, stickers, pictures and fill with sweets or treats. Roll up a couple of resolutions sealed with a heart sticker!

### **Super Bowl Sunday Boxed Party**

Microwave popcorn, pretzels, peanuts, M&Ms, snacks, snacks and more snacks. Don't forget football theme plates, napkins, bowls, etc., as well as team paraphernalia.



## February

### **Groundhog Day**

February 2. Send the movie wrapped in a scarf and tie on something Springy.

### **Valentine's Day**

The ultimate in "Treats for Sweets"! Send cards and love notes; fill personalized heart shaped containers with Valentine candies; send a message out of conversation hearts; insert a new or favorite photo into a mug with removable liner and fill mug with sweet treats; those garlands that the kids have made out of hearts, lips, cupids, arrows, etc. to hang in wardroom, ready room, or mess deck.

### **Mardi Gras**

Don't forget your adopted sailor!

### **Leap Year**

February 29. Go ahead "Pop the Question" – tell him you'd marry him all over again!



## March

The windy month – send a couple of kites to fly off the fantail in their "spare" time!

### **St. Patrick's Day**

March 17. Fill a bucket or two with gold coins, green sugar cookies, spearmint candies and other treats. Enclose a rainbow that the kids have made. Optional rubber snakes – for laughs!! Include a CD of Irish drinking songs, complete with green drink mix (Kool-Aid, Gatorade, Margarita?!). Decorate the shipping carton with things Irish.

### **March Madness**

Fill sports shoe boxes with basketball theme items. Include colors, mascots, sportswear from specific schools, especially if you know there's a fan or two onboard. And don't forget the snacks! Maybe send "the brackets" from newspapers along with the Sunday comics so that favorite teams can be followed. Remember your adopted sailor!



## April

### April Fools' Day

Just keep it tasteful!

### Easter Baskets

Fill 'em up with all kinds of sweet treats. Send an Easter egg hunt consisting of plastic eggs filled with candies, nuts, etc. to be scattered on wardroom/mess deck tables. Bear in mind the overall weight of candy and its "meltability." Include those garlands the kids have worked so hard on! And don't lay an egg by forgetting your adopted sailor!

### Shower Caps/Rain Bonnets

Fill with appropriate "shower" toiletries!

### Daylight Savings Time Begins

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday. Good time to send another supply of batteries for that CD/tape player, Game-boy or boombox.

### Baseball Season Begins

Send some peanuts and Crackerjacks with a P.S. that we really DO care when they get back!

### Tax Day

A little humor helps on this awful day - send a "tax refund" of play money, some aspirin and a wacky tax form that's been "appropriately filled out."



## May

### Kentucky Derby Day (1<sup>st</sup> Saturday in May)

Send horse racing game (divisions pick a color and race against each other). Include mint iced tea mixes, along with those snacks.

### Cinco de Mayo

Break out anything Mexican and colorful. Throw in dry, non-alcohol Margarita mix packets, chips, salsa (packed carefully), canned bean dip, etc. Pinatas can hold lots of treats!

### Mother's Day

Second Sunday in May. Remember all the moms in your life!

### Spouse Appreciation Day

Friday before Mother's Day — Express your appreciation with a bag of May flowers. Fill a flower decorated bag with an appreciative card, and a picture or two, along with other sweet treats. Scent some tissue paper or the card with your favorite fragrance.

### Armed Forces Day

3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday. Break out the red, white and blue! It'll come in handy over the next few months! A great way to remember your adopted sailor!

### Indy 500 Race/Memorial Day Weekend

Send over small Matchbox type cars for shipboard racing. Don't forget the checkered flags along with those Chex mix snacks. Maybe include a pair of fuzzy dice for the winner to enjoy along with his celebratory cold bottle of milk!



## June

### Flag Day

June 14. Send red/white/blue ribbon for table runners along with small, individual flags tied into patriotic colored bags filled with goodies; or simply decorate white bakery bags with flag oriented stickers and fill with edible or wearable goodies.

### Father's Day

Third Sunday. Remember deployed dads with cards and letters from home. Send along a phone card to make calling home easier.

BBQ in a Box. Spice up the ship's "steel picnics" by sending inexpensive chef's aprons with rank or rating stenciled on in ketchup red or mustard yellow! Include summer picnic theme paper napkins, plates, and paper drink umbrellas to go with the cups. Send a Hawaiian shirt or wacky ball cap to your adopted sailor!

### Family Vacation

Send brochures, maps, and pictures of possible family vacation spots to visit, with a note to "hurry home and join us" or "sure did miss you"!!!

### Sports

Races, Playoffs, and Championships. Pro Basketball, Hockey, Little League Baseball, T-Ball, Wimbledon, golf, arena football, horseracing – Preakness and Belmont, auto races.



## July

### Independence Day

July 4<sup>th</sup> – Let your patriotism shine through with everything red, white and blue! Take empty toilet paper rolls and fill with anything small (film, stickers, stars, batteries, pens, T-shirts, candies, pictures, etc.) then wrap rolls in metallic paper, tying off both ends with curling ribbons. Voila – firecrackers. Use same ideas with paper towel tubes glued onto dowels and call them Roman Candles!!! Send patriotic theme plates and napkins, bunting, flags, CDs, phone cards – anything American!!

### Beach Party!

Fill personalized sand buckets with beach goodies such as sun tan lotion, aloe gel, jelly beans in exotic drink flavors, squirt guns, T-shirts, beach music CDs, non-alcohol drink mixes (complete with paper umbrellas), and munchies. Don't leave your adopted sailor out of the festivities!



## August

### Dog Days of Summer

Decorate ball caps with different types of dog ears made of fabric or paper. Break out the rubber stamps and have the kids create placemats or cards featuring paw prints, dog bones, bowls, anything canine, including a picture of your own Fido.

### National Aviation Day

August 19. OK aviation community, a day tailor made for you! Send prizes for the best landing, best wire, best crew, best approach, best call sign, best anything!



## September

### **“Back to School”**

Get an extra pencil box or plastic case and fill it with pencils, pens, stamps, gum, a phone card. Enclose a picture of the children’s first day of school for that year. Put some traditional school lunch favorites like Oreo cookies or Hostess cupcakes in a decorated lunch bag and personalize it with a picture from elementary school days.

### **Labor Day**

First Monday. No need to put away the red, white and blue just yet! Put together a “lazy day” package of goodies to munch, a book or magazine to read and a new or favorite CD or tape.

### **NFL/College Football Begins**

Start it off with appropriate team paraphernalia, Nerf footballs, the sports pages from previous weeks’ pre-season games and lots of snack treats like popcorn, peanuts and pretzels. (And who are you not going to forget to include?!)

### **Ombudsman Appreciation Day**

September 14. Thank your Ombudsman “for being there” from “both sides” of the ocean, with a card, encouraging phone call, flowers, lunch, movie pass, gift certificate, and a bottle of aspirin!



## October:

### **Columbus Day**

Second Monday. Celebrate this discovery anniversary with your own discovery - each other! Use old world wrapping paper to fashion a bag or wrap a box which contains a few items or remembrances of the first time you met and dated. Include pictures, make a recording of “Remember when we first met...” or describe on flowery paper a couple of your first recollections of “budding romance” and slip it inside a Thinking of You card.

### **Navy Birthday**

October 13, 1775. Celebrate over two centuries of navy tradition.

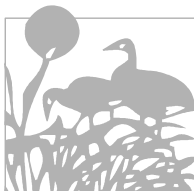
### **Veterans Day**

Fourth Monday. Thank a Vet! Thank spouses, dads, moms, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors, good friends, anyone who now wears or has worn the uniform proudly.

### **Halloween**

October 31. It’s not just for kids anymore and kids will have a blast helping to put together the appropriate Trick or Treat bag full of goodies. As a treat, include a disposable camera or film and encourage picture taking. Please don’t forget your adopted sailor - that would be ghoulish!

Start asking for holiday wish list suggestions! Emphasize that parcels have to be mailed extra early to FPO addresses which leaves fewer shopping days for you, but better selections now.



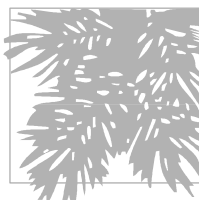
## November

### Marine Corps Birthday

November 10, 1775. The Navy's security force and the country's first fighting force. Wish a Marine "Happy Birthday" today and watch his reaction!

### Thanksgiving

Fourth Thursday. Decorate the front of a small Lucite frame and list on pretty fall paper reasons why you feel thankful and insert in the frame. Or make a collage of everyone's reasons and insert into a larger, decorated Lucite frame to be displayed in the wardroom, ready room, or mess deck areas. Decorate small mugs with removable liners, add pictures, and fill mug with goodies. Send disposable cameras or film and encourage picture taking. (Possible mission for the adopted sailor?!) Have kids make Thanksgiving theme placemats, centerpieces, and garlands to promote picture taking!



## December

### Army Navy Game

GO NAVY – beat Army!!! (Don't become a goat and overlook your adopted sailor!)

### Stockings

Felt, needlepoint, cross-stitch, quilted, hand knit, fuzzy fleece, velvet — lots of options! Personalize with embroidery, felt, iron-ons, cording, colored pens, velcro — just keep glitter to a minimum (ideally, none — remember how tough it is to deal with in the house, it's worse at sea). Fill with festive goodies to eat, wear or use — you know the list by now!

### Christmas Tree

Create a tree out of felt and decorate with family pictures framed in felt ornaments. Attach to tree with velcro or glue. The tree can be "giant-sized" and displayed in the wardroom, ready room or mess deck, or sent to individuals to hang on doors or walls. After the holidays, it is easy to roll up and store for future use. Be sure to leave proper instructions so that all of the hard work does not go to waste.

### Holiday Card

An over-sized Christmas, Chanukah, or Kwanza card can be a convenient alternative to a Christmas tree or menorah. (Save afterwards? Might become a favorite heirloom for future celebrations!)

### Santa Hats

Send a Santa hat for the CO and elves hats for the rest. These scenes must be preserved in pictures!!!

### Holiday Decorations

There are many holidays this time of year with various decorations. The kids may enjoy making decorations for your holiday and sharing in the excitement of making it festive.

### Presents

Remember space and weight limitations as well as wish list requests. SEND EARLY!!!

## Anytime Ideas

The following ideas are good to send anytime, for any reason:

### Food

Cookies, brownies, munchies, nuts, candies, microwave popcorn, etc. (Tuck little messages inside.)

Send a jar of "Sunshine Pills" with a "prescription" to take daily, as needed, to brighten the day. Or count enough candies for the time deployed and make the "prescription" read to take one daily 'til home, safe and sound!

### Phone Cards

Makes it easy to call home from a foreign port without needing the local currency.

### Notes & Letters

Choose a different color of ink and write a letter or note on fun, pretty paper. Scent the envelope with a favorite fragrance!

Write a message or letter on a roll of adding machine tape – make it a journal of your time apart – and send it as you finish the roll, re-rolling it so that it is read from the beginning.

Make a small, personal calendar with "can't forget" dates circled or appropriately marked. Pre-buy, address, and stamp cards so that all that is needed is a quick note and a lick to send it on its way from the deployed ship.

### CDs, Tapes, Movies, Computer Games, Blank Videos

Videos and pictures of families, group meetings, group outings (Busch Gardens, Easter Sunday, picnics, pool parties, first day of school, baseball games, etc., etc.).

### Coupon Book

Create coupons to be cashed in sometime after returning home. Leave a couple blank to be filled in later.

### Cards

Send cards for birthdays, anniversaries, thinking of you, graduation or other special occasions.

### Group Photos

Have a group photo made of spouses in themed attire — Hawaiian shirts, "little black dress," Sunday best, wigs, hats, SBD jackets, etc. Get it enlarged on good stock, sign the back with an encouraging message and send early into the deployment.

### Send a Monthly Newsletter

Can be sent via e-mail or print it out on fun computer stationery. Include those pictures either separate or as part of the printout.

### Jigsaw Puzzles

Enlarge a group picture or family snapshot to poster size, back it with white cardboard or posterboard, sign or write messages on back then cut into a jigsaw puzzle. Once put together, the poster can be proudly displayed in the wardroom, ready room, or mess deck area.

### Music

Use song titles and lines from favorite songs to say how you feel. Record a series of favorite, special songs and send along with some fresh batteries.



### • PLAN AHEAD

The Sub community has us all beat in this department! All deployment "goodies" have to be planned, created, worked and finished, then delivered to the contact person on the boat. No reason why the rest of us can't borrow a page or two from these industrious gals and send various commands to sea with packages tagged "Do Not Open Until \_\_\_\_\_"  
(dinner, midnight, breakfast, etc.).

### • DONATIONS

Merchants, shops, restaurants and stores that you frequent are often happy to donate items for kids parties, fundraisers, auctions, etc. All you have to do is ASK!!!! Good business for them, good for you!

### • "DOLLAR" STORES

Locate the nearest "gold mine" of a store for vast amounts of inexpensive party ideas, candy, snack foods, costume accessories, etc.

### • Remember to ship packages at least 3 – 4 weeks ahead of time to ensure on time delivery.

### • If sending multiple packages, label them "1 of 3, 2 of 3, 3 of 3" and always include a return address.

### • Got coins and paper money from foreign countries? Gather it up, sort it out and pack it/send it if that country is scheduled as a port visit.



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# Half-Way Celebration Ideas

Share the Excitement! You've made it Half Way! It's all downhill truly memorable for those who attend and for those at sea:

## Videos

Videotape the events of the evening to send to the ship or squadron. Ideas include:

Having a separate room set up to record a personal message. Remember that while your video message will be taped privately, it will more than likely not be viewed in the same manner. Keep it tasteful so as to avoid embarrassment on both sides of the ocean.

Let a "roving camcorder" visit each table for an impromptu hello to your Sweets.

## Portraits

A nice alternative to a video is to have a professional photographer on hand to take candid or sit-down portraits of members at tables or in groups. After all, you do want to show off that new hair style, or weight loss to go along with that new outfit, don't you?

## Yellow Ribbon Banner

Take a roll of wide gift wrap or florists ribbon and write lots of "reasons to hurry home" messages as you unroll the ribbon. Use different colored markers. (Good activity for the "roving camcorder" to zoom in on! Explain via the camcorder that the ribbon should be draped and displayed throughout various work stations, mess decks, ward and ready rooms, as appropriate.) After the evening's activities have concluded, designate some responsible, early riser who will package both the ribbon and the videotape and send to the ship first thing next morning.

## Door Prizes

Raffle off items that have been "ingeniously" donated such as gift certificates from department stores, beauty makeovers, haircuts, spa treatments, movie tickets, baskets filled with a variety of goodies, dinners, etc. Use the earnings from the raffles to help defray the costs of the evening or put the monies towards the next (AND LAST) hurdle – Homecoming!!!!



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**ADDITIONAL  
IDEAS**  
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- **Time is a constant that keeps on ticking at a constant rate. For some people, keeping busy creates the illusion of time passing more quickly; for others, taking it slow with a good book or quiet project is the best way to spend time apart.**
- **Do your thinking on paper via daily or weekly “To Do” lists. It helps you organize and provides motivation to cross off those “Dos” to “Don’ts.”**
- **Ask questions — Listen to answers — Don’t reinvent the wheel!**
- **Don’t procrastinate – make minor decisions quickly.**
- **Take a “mind nap” — relax and occasionally do nothing!**

## **Decorations**

Make or otherwise secure centerpieces for each table (they don’t have to be the same thing) and include them as part of the raffle items. Fresh flowers, small baskets of goodies, silk flowers, or stuffed animals representing the command or your deployment theme will be a great reminder of a memorable evening.

(Don’t forget that children are counting the days also and they need helpers to make time pass, too. Halfway activities for them might include a picnic, baseball game or bowling, swimming, or pizza party.)

## **Messages**

While sending messages to the command is nice, receiving them is even better, especially if it’s presented as a surprise during the evening! With a little planning and forethought you could get the command to send any (or all!) of the following:

Send a sheet to the command to hang where everyone will get the chance to write a message to their loved one(s). (Don’t forget to send appropriate pens or markers, etc.) Towards the end of the Halfway Night festivities, let everyone in attendance cut out their messages to take home with them.

Send the command some pretty paper and envelopes (very important!) and request that all who wish to do so send a message or two to their spouse (and children). Have the command send all messages back to a designated member of the group or committee. Present the notes, maybe with a flower if funds permit, either upon arrival or at some other appropriate time during the evening’s festivities.

Send a blank videotape to the command and have deployed members send video greetings back for an ensemble viewing sometime during dinner. (Be sure to bring, or better yet, have the appropriate video equipment provided by the facility where the evening’s activities will be held so that all can see and hear this work of art!)

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# HOMEcoming!

Planning for Homecoming can be a big job, but it is first and foremost a happy time for all concerned. It is easy to get carried away in wanting to throw the best welcome home party ever, but it can quickly become too costly to be practical. That is why it's a good idea to establish a Homecoming Committee early into the deployment, ideally, by the first or second group meeting. The Committee should be able to help the support group realistically determine both in time and money the kind of homecoming that is desired. Remember the saying "there is beauty in simplicity." The simple fact is that families want to be together again as quickly as possible. The beauty is that it can be done in many different ways from low key to high tech. A successful homecoming accomplishes both efficiently.

As group dynamics change, so do homecomings. If the group wants to keep it simple yet one or two want a Hollywood style homecoming, there's no reason why such on a grand scale can't occur at individual homes. The Homecoming Committee should be expected to facilitate the production of homecoming activities as well as coordinate all of the details involved in bringing two large, diverse groups of people together, then quickly sending them on their way home. Possible committee positions and their duties might include:

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## **Chairman**

Coordinates all activities, selects various sub-committee chairmen, gathers their reports, establishes a schedule of committee meetings and project drop-off dates and times. Works with the host command to assure permissions and rules are understood and carried back to the group. Usually this is a two person team (the ombudsman and the CO or XO spouse) who often will forego their own private homecoming to make it special for others.

## **Fund Raising**

Coordinates the ideas to raise money, organizes the activities and solicits volunteers to work on the projects.

## **Publicity**

Use a variety of avenues - radio, TV, billboards, marquees, newspapers – to publicize homecoming events. Check with advertisers to find out about their advance notice requirements. When publicizing events, credit local sponsors who made it possible. Work closely with the local PAO before releasing dates and information pertaining to the homecoming. As plans are made and approved, be sure the information is made available through e-mail and printed in the Ombudsman's newsletter. Sending separate letters to out-of-town guests with information about lodging, meals, transportation, etc., is a big help to many.

## **Donations**

Responsible for pounding the pavement and asking for donations (raffle items, door prizes, single crewmember freebies) which help keep overall costs down. (Remember that the ship or squadron should not have to buy its own homecoming and that single members would rather not spend their hard-earned money on face painting and balloons.) Follows up with thank you notes to the donors.

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## Host Command/Sister Ship

Just when you think that everything is coming together as planned — on time and under budget — you wake up in a cold sweat wondering about backup plans, inclement weather, tents, chairs, tables, ice, sodas, food, Porta-Potties, trash facilities, parking/transportation and cleanup for hundreds, maybe thousands of people. Sound like a nightmare? It would be if it weren't for the Host Command/Sister Ship.

In general, anywhere from 14 to 75 days out, a Host Command/Sister Ship will be assigned to individual ships returning from deployment. (See instructions from various Type Communities) Both the returning commands and Host Commands in port are advised through the Fleet Coordinator (445-9923) whose job is to know the numbers, classes, and approximate dates of arrival for ships returning from deployment.

Assignment of Host Command/Sister Ship is based on projected available pier space for the appropriate returning ship. Once that information has been determined, it is then passed on to the returning CO/XO who in turn passes it on to the spouse, ombudsman, or group president. Ideally, the Host Command will make the first move and contact the CO/XO spouse and advise the name and number of the person who will be helping with homecoming needs. Often though, the spouse will have to make the call to get this information. (In some cases, the returning ship will send an Advance Officer (or Team) back early to help the Host Command /Sister Ship with homecoming activities.) Once contact has been established, then the “nightmarish” little details can be worked out. Be flexible and always keep the lines of communication open! A Can Do spirit Can Get Things Done!!

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## Banners, Signs and Other Works of Art.

A particularly fun and creative part of Homecoming is sign and banner preparation. The excitement practically leaps off the sheets and posters! Even the casual observer will usually slow down to take it all in and hopefully drive on with a chuckle or two, at least until the next light. However, since the signs and banners can indeed be distractions to drivers and pedestrians alike, please be aware of the following rules regarding placement of signs and banners:

Signs cannot be hung from the outer base perimeter fence (U.S. Government property regulations).

Signs cannot be placed along Taussig Blvd. (City of Norfolk property).

Burma-Shave type signs can be placed along roadways and medians ON BASE only.

All banners, signs and decorations must be taken down the same day.

A huge banner can be hung from the walkway at Gate One but it must represent the entire Battle Group.

Electronic signs will be arranged by AIRLANT PAO.

Balloons cannot be released, so if using balloons as part of any homecoming signage or decoration, be sure that they are securely tied, clamped, chained or otherwise prohibited from flying away!

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### Tips

- **Some banners and signs might be created with the idea of carefully storing and re-using them at a later date by another command. (Arrange for storage from command to command rather than on board ship.)**
- **When in doubt about anything pertaining to Homecoming, always check with the Host Command/Sister Ship first. If they don't have an immediate answer, they will find it for you.**



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## Pier or Hangar Activities

The wait to catch the ship's silhouette on the horizon or to see that little dot in the sky become a roaring aircraft may seem to last a l-o-n-g time. For this reason, it is helpful to have a few organized activities to entertain children and adults alike. Some pier or hangar activities can be arranged through MWR, the host command, Armed Services YMCA, or even the USO. Other groups such as the Navy League, VFW, or American Legion might enjoy being asked/invited to participate — it can't hurt to call and ask — military ties run deep. It's a good idea to check and see what these groups might provide for you before you make your own plans. Just be sure to clear the activities with the host command beforehand.

### Clowns

Clowns make balloon animals, talk to the kids, maybe face paint, and make everyone smile. Check with local resources for clowns before hiring one. The host command, MWR, ASYMCA, or USO may have someone who regularly volunteers their time for such occasions.

### Kid's Corner

Sometimes clowns can unknowingly scare little ones, so rope off a section to create a place for kids to entertain each other. Roll out a sheet of white paper (butcher paper taped down works really well) and let the kids write or color their own messages with chalk, crayons or "non-messy" markers. Some coloring books, word games, travel games, etc., can be easy, portable distractions for a while. Don't overlook the thrill of bubble wrap! Tape or weight some down and let 'em have at it. It can be loud but the kids love it!

### Music

Bands (brass or marching), DJs, tapes, CDs, remote radio broadcasts. The host command should be able to help secure the Navy Band, or if they are unavailable, don't overlook local high school bands.

### Food and Drink

The host command should be able to furnish this for you, along with tents, chairs and ice. Important things to ask for, in addition to coffee, are — for the sake of clean clothes and faces — no chocolate or bug juice! Fruit juices or lemonade and sodas can suffice, along with plain sugar cookies, doughnuts or doughnut holes, etc.

### Popcorn

The USO of Hampton Roads at Norfolk Naval Air Station (440-0939) has a popcorn machine that they can provide, along with a welcome table and costumes for entertaining children on the pier or in hangars. Be sure to call them early to reserve their services for your pier or hangar.